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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: NOMINATION OF NEHAD ABOUL KOMSAN FOR THE 2009
SECRETARY'S AWARD FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMEN OF COURAGE

REF: A. STATE 99729
[1](#)B. CAIRO 2251

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Nehad Aboul Komsan, Embassy Cairo's nominee for the Secretary's International Women of Courage Award, deserves USG commendation for her tireless campaigning on behalf of women's rights in Egypt in an often hostile public environment. Aboul Komsan's efforts as Chair of the Board of Directors of the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) range from providing training for female political candidates to raising societal awareness of the growing problem of sexual harassment and assault, to providing legal assistance for impoverished women. ECHR is a small, independent NGO that receives funds from the EU, MEPI and private foundations. Aboul Komsan has courageously pressed for advancement on women's issues in the face of government policy that is often indifferent to women's concerns and sometimes obstructionist. A lawyer by training, she has used her skills to provide legal aid to impoverished women, and legal representation for the plaintiff in the October 21 landmark ruling against a perpetrator of sexual assault (ref B). She has used her political skills to provide training for female candidates who successfully ran in 2005 and 2008 elections that were marred by government interference. Aboul Komsan has deployed her public relations skills in ECWR's campaign to raise awareness of sexual harassment and assault, and to publicize the dangers of female genital mutilation (FGM) -- playing an important role in the passage of the June 2008 Child Law that criminalizes the practice. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Training for Female Political Candidates: Aboul Komsan and the ECWR have been at the forefront of providing training for female candidates in the 2005 Egyptian parliamentary and 2008 local council elections. The ECWR worked to train 16 female candidates in campaigning and organizational skills for the 2005 parliamentary elections, and succeeded in helping 2 of these candidates win seats despite government violence and intimidation. Leading up to the 2008 local council elections, Aboul Komsan and the ECWR provided training that enabled 100 women to win seats under challenging circumstances, including voter intimidation and fraud. Not content with this effort, the ECWR also works to provide ongoing political and legislative training for the female members of parliament and the local councils. Aboul Komsan and the ECWR have supplemented these efforts with media outreach to emphasize and explain the necessity of women's political participation, and with gender-sensitive election monitoring during the 2005 and 2008 elections to describe government practices that discriminated against women. Aboul Komsan and her organization have drafted a proposed amendment to change Egypt's current electoral law to prevent discrimination against women, and have formed a coalition to actively lobby on behalf of the amendment.

¶3. (U) Campaigning against Sexual Harassment and Assault: Aboul Komsan's public campaign against the prevalent and destructive problems of sexual harassment and assault in Egypt is one of the ECWR's flagship efforts. The campaign has aggressively worked with media outlets to raise societal awareness of these problems, and to publicize the results of ECWR's recent research survey that details the pervasiveness of sexual harassment and assault in Egypt. Aboul Komsan's campaign against sexual harassment and assault has included distributing detailed cards and pamphlets instructing women how to file complaints in police stations against assailants, and how to respond to indifferent or hostile police officers. In addition, Aboul Komsan has been lobbying for improved street lighting, better police protection and community vigilance to deter assault and harassment.

¶4. (U) Campaigning against Sexual Harassment and Assault (continued): As the only organization in Egypt waging a public campaign against harassment and assault, Aboul Komsan deserves significant credit for the October 21 landmark court decision sentencing a perpetrator of sexual assault to 3 years in prison for the first time in Egyptian history (ref B). Moreover, Aboul Komsan's organization provided legal representation to the plaintiff in this important case, which has the potential to be catalyst for changing attitudes on the Egyptian street and paving the way for additional women's rights. Aboul Komsan has drafted new legislation that would specifically criminalize sexual assault and harassment, which are currently prosecuted under a general statute prohibiting the "Corruption of Morals." The legislation would address the problem of Egyptian women's reluctance to come forward to testify in assault and harassment cases by allowing a court to convict an assailant based on witness testimony alone.

Aboul Komsan's draft statute would also empower police officers to file immediate reports on the spot, instead of working through the current time-consuming bureaucratic procedures.

¶5. (U) Legal Empowerment and Aid: Aboul Komsan and her staff provide direct legal assistance to impoverished women to help them with divorce and domestic violence cases. Aboul Komsan's legal empowerment program has succeeded in encouraging poor women to be active participants in their own legal cases and in passing on their new knowledge of the legal system to others, thereby fostering a culture of self-sufficiency and autonomy. ECWR has worked with coalitions of other women's rights groups to achieve milestones such as improving Egypt's nationality law to benefit women and instituting "khul divorce" in Egypt, a Sharia concept now part of Egyptian civil law which permits women to divorce their husbands without establishing fault.

¶6. (U) Combating Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): Aboul Komsan has spearheaded efforts in Egypt on the "Stop FGM" regional campaign funded by the Italian Foreign Ministry through UNICEF. She has publicized information about FGM in Egypt, thereby playing an important role in advancing the June 2008 passage of the new Child Law that criminalizes FGM. FGM is a deeply entrenched cultural practice in Egypt -- affecting both Muslim and Christian women -- and Aboul Komsan played an important role in the bill's passage by raising public awareness of the issue.

¶7. (U) Initiative for Small NGOs and Women: Building on her philosophy of creating self-sufficiency and autonomy in women, Aboul Komsan has implemented a project which has selected small NGOs to assist poor women in establishing businesses to generate income. ECWR trains the NGOs on assisting the women establish small businesses, administering small grants, keeping financial records and tracking the women's progress. The project has been successful in alleviating the poverty of these women, a step which Aboul Komsan sees as essential to promoting women rights.

¶8. (U) Biographical Data:

Full Legal Name: Nehad Aboul Komsan

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Center for Women's Rights

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19. (U) Ms. Aboul Komsan has confirmed to post she is honored
to be a nominee for the 2009 Secretary's International Women
of Courage Award.
SCOBAY